this way. Describing politics as ‘the art of the possible’, Whitlam queried, ‘is it likely? … Is Caucus going to embarrass a successful, positive Government? They are proud of it, they are part of it’.[53]

Whitlam’s optimism was sorely tested barely a day later with the American military’s carpet bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong Harbour in North Vietnam, during a critical period of ‘peace negotiations’. For eleven days, with a civilised 36-hour halt for Christmas Day, US war planes dropped more bombs over North Vietnam than in all of the previous three years; witnesses reported B-52s taking off from Guam air-base every five minutes.[54] Whitlam was, like many in the caucus and Cabinet, deeply distressed by this indiscriminate bombing in a war he had long described as ‘immoral’. At a press conference the day after his ministry’s swearing-in, he appeared restrained, even uncritical, emphasising the importance of continued peace negotiations. Two of the most prominent anti-war campaigners in his Cabinet—Tom Uren and Jim Cairns—privately condemned Whitlam’s response as weak and vacillating and made their own public pronouncements. Cairns called it ‘the most brutal, indiscriminating slaughter of defenceless men, women and children in